

CHAPTER XVI

FROM THE ETSIN-GOL TO THE T' IEN-SHAN

I HAD previously visited this region of the Etsin-gol in the spring of 1914 when coming from the exploration of the ancient *Limes* north of Su-chou to which I have briefly referred above. I was attracted to this portion of southernmost Mongolia by its geographical character, which suggested resemblance to that of the Lop basin, quite as much also by its historical past. For it had been once included in the wide dominion held by those early nomadic masters of Kansu, the 'Great Yüeh-chih', the later Indo-Scythians, and by the Huns whose successive migrations westwards were destined to affect so deeply the history of Central Asia as well as of Europe and India. In the valley of the Etsin-gol, Nature, by affording water and grazing, has ever provided an easy route for raids and invasions from the Mongolian steppes into the line of oases which extends along the northern foot of the Nan-shan and provide the great natural highway connecting China with the Tarim basin and innermost Central Asia.

Starting from Su-chou early in May 1914, I followed the Pei-ta-ho, the river of Su-chou, down to the oasis of Chin-t'a, and thence tracked the line of the ancient Chinese *Limes* where it skirts the barren stony glacis of the south-